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Despite Objections, Pentagon Takes Step Toward Buying New Nuclear Weapons

[Defense One](#)

July 29, 2016

The U.S. Air Force took a first step toward buying controversial new nuclear weapons Friday, asking defense companies to submit bids to design and build cruise missiles and ICBMs.

The move comes amid the highest tension with Russia since the end of the Cold War and flies in the face of senators who have called on the Obama administration to cancel plans to build the new cruise missile, called the Long-Range Standoff Weapon, or LRSO.

“The LRSO weapon system will be a cost-effective force multiplier for B-52, B-2, and B-21 aircraft to credibly deter adversaries and assure U.S. allies of our deterrent capabilities,” the Air Force officials said in a statement, referring to the two existing and one planned nuclear-capable bombers.

In the statement, they said they would choose up to two contractors by the fourth quarter of 2017 to build the new cruise missiles. Those two contractors will then compete for 54 months “to complete a preliminary design with demonstrated reliability and manufacturability, which will be followed by a competitive down-select to a single contractor,” the statement said.

A group of 10 senators, all Democrats, have called on the Obama administration to scale back its plans for new nuclear weapons and the bombers and submarines that will carry them. The senators specifically called for canceling LRSO, saying it could save taxpayers \$20 billion.

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“Nuclear war poses the gravest risk to American national security,” the senators wrote.

The Air Force countered that argument Friday, saying the new cruise missile is necessary to replace its current air-launched cruise missiles, which were designed in the 1970s and built in the 1980s. The Air Force wants the new missiles by 2030.

“LRSO is a critical element of the United States’ nuclear deterrence strategy,” said Maj. Gen. Scott Jansson, commander of the Air Force Nuclear Weapons Center and Air Force program executive officer for strategic systems. “Releasing this solicitation is a critical step toward affordably recapitalizing the aging air leg of the nuclear triad.”

The triad is a reference to the Pentagon’s three nuclear arms, Air Force strategic bombers, intercontinental ballistic missiles and Navy submarines, which carry nuclear missiles.

The Air Force also issues a solicitation Friday to buy new ICBMs to replace the Minuteman, which date back to the 1960s, but have been upgraded over the years. The Air Force calls the replacement project the “Ground-Based Strategic Deterrent.”

“The new GBSD weapon system will meet existing national requirements, while having the adaptability and flexibility to affordably address changing technology and threat environments through 2075,” the Air Force said.

The Pentagon wants to deploy the new ICBMs in the late 2020s.

The Congressional Budget Office last year estimated it would cost about \$350 billion to buy new nuclear weapons, ICBMs, stealth bombers, submarines and cruise missiles, between 2015 and 2024 based on the

Pentagon's current plans. The total cost of buying all of the new weapons over the next 25 years is estimated at more than \$700 billion.

Last October, the Air Force announced it had selected Northrop Grumman to build new stealth bombers that will carry nuclear weapons. The B-2 and B-52 are the Air Force's two active strategic bombers that can carry both nuclear and conventional bombs. The Navy is in the early stages of buying new submarines, which will replace the Ohio-class subs.

Friday's announcement comes as Congress is out of session until after the Labor Day holiday in September.

Air Force Seeks New Nuclear Weapons

[Wheeling News-Register](#)

July 31, 2016

WASHINGTON (AP) — Advancing what could become a near-total rebuild of the U.S. nuclear weapons arsenal, the Air Force on Friday solicited industry proposals to build a new fleet of land-based nuclear missiles as well as replacements for its air-launched nuclear cruise missile force.

The two projects are part of a broader modernization of the nuclear arsenal expected to cost hundreds of billions of dollars over 30 years. The plans have broad support in Congress, although some, including Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., have questioned the need to replace all three "legs" of the nuclear triad — the submarines, long-range bombers and land-based missiles that were developed by the Pentagon during a Cold War arms race with the Soviet Union.

The Air Force operates two of the three legs the nuclear arsenal — the bombers and the Minuteman 3 intercontinental ballistic missiles, or ICBMs, that are ready for launching on short notice from underground silos in five states.

On Friday the Air Force asked that industry contractors submit proposals for a new-generation ICBM, and said it plans to award the first contracts next summer. It would replace the existing fleet of about 450 deployed Minuteman 3 ICBMs, starting in 2027. The estimated cost is \$62.3 billion, according to Leah Bryant, spokeswoman for the Air Force Nuclear Weapons Center.

An Air Force press release quoted Gen. Robin Rand, who heads Air Force Global Strike Command, as saying the Minuteman 3, which was first deployed in 1970, will have “a difficult time surviving” air defenses foreseen for 2030 and beyond.

The Air Force also requested contractor proposals for a new-generation nuclear cruise missile to replace the existing AGM-86B cruise missile, which was fielded in the early 1980s. It provided no cost estimate for the replacement missile.

Critics of buying a new nuclear cruise missile include a former secretary of defense, William Perry, who has called on President Barack Obama to scrap the project.

The Navy wants to build new nuclear-missile submarines to replace its aging fleet of Ohio-class subs, and the Air Force is planning a new fleet of nuclear-capable long-range bombers to replace the B-52.

Daryl Kimball, executive director of the Arms Control Association, said the broad rebuild of the nuclear arsenal is financially unsustainable.

NMED Cabinet Secretary Ryan Flynn To Step Down

[Los Alamos Daily Post](#)

July 29, 2016

SANTA FE – Today, Gov. Susana Martinez announced that New Mexico Environment Department Secretary Ryan Flynn will step down effective Aug. 12.

Secretary Flynn has served as Cabinet Secretary since 2013 and as Environment’s General Counsel from 2011 to 2013. Deputy Cabinet Secretary Butch Tongate will serve as acting Cabinet Secretary.

“Secretary Flynn has put his heart and soul into protecting our environment and always put New Mexicans first,” Martinez said. “Under his strong leadership, our administration negotiated the largest settlement in the history of the United States between a state and the Department of Energy, held the EPA accountable during the Gold King Mine spill, and took action on the Kirtland Air Force Base spill. It’s hard to see him leave, but we are proud of the work he has accomplished for this administration.”

Secretary Flynn hit the ground running at the beginning of his tenure by holding the U.S. Air Force accountable and starting the remediation process for the jet fuel plume at Kirtland Air Force Base.

Less than six months into his term as Cabinet Secretary, the radiation leak at the Department of Energy’s Waste Isolation Pilot Plant in Carlsbad occurred. Flynn ensured a rapid and coordinated response on behalf of New Mexicans, leading scientists, lawyers, regulators, and specialists to collaborate and accomplish the safe and immediate closure of the storage facility. Since then, with the Martinez Administration, Flynn negotiated the largest settlement in the history of the United States between the Department of Energy and any state for the accidental release of radiation — a total of \$74 million.

When the EPA caused a blowout of three million gallons of toxic waste last summer, Secretary Flynn led the efforts to bring stakeholders, civic leaders, and state officials together on behalf of the communities in the Animas and San Juan Rivers’ watershed. When faced with misinformation and delays,

Flynn led the charge to hold the EPA accountable. He and his team initiated litigation against the federal agency, contractor, and mine owners that caused the spill; and in a Supreme Court lawsuit, he initiated action against the State of Colorado.

“Serving the State of New Mexico has been the most gratifying experience of my career, and I want to express my sincere appreciation to Governor Martinez and her staff for their leadership, friendship and support over the past five and a half years,” Secretary Flynn said. “Thanks to Governor Martinez’s leadership, we have made unprecedented progress on a number of important environmental issues.”

Flynn added, “I’m the proud father of two daughters under the age of 3, and I look forward to spending more time with them and my beautiful wife.”

Secretary Flynn is known for his ability to help foster agreements to benefit New Mexicans; the San Juan Generating Station (SJGS) agreement being one of the hallmark deals that he brokered. Under the SJGS agreement, New Mexico accomplishes the greatest greenhouse gas reductions in the state’s history – a 5.7 million ton reduction of CO2 emissions.

Revising penalty policies, revising and creating more stringent groundwater standards, developing the toughest copper rule in the nation, and developing dairy regulations that protect groundwater while allowing for technical innovation are among the many, less prominent but significant and necessary initiatives that Flynn championed. His remarkable tenure at the Environment Department leaves the agency and present and future generations of New Mexicans with stronger and more comprehensive environmental protections to foster a healthy and prosperous state.

Savannah River Remediation plans to work itself out of business

[The Aiken Standard](#)

July 30, 2016

Most companies wouldn't say that working themselves out of business was a viable business plan, but for Savannah River Remediation, that's exactly what they want to do.

SRR is a management and operations contract company for the Department of Energy handling liquid waste at the Savannah River Site, or SRS. The liquid waste is an unusable byproduct from nuclear materials development, primarily plutonium operations at SRS during the Cold War.

Tom Foster, president and CEO of SRR, said, "We have waste that's a legacy from the Cold War. We did what we needed to do, and in our current generation, it's our obligation to manage that and try to clean that up. That's really our mission focus."

The waste was contained in 51 carbon-steel tanks located in two designated "tank farms" in F and H areas. Eight of those tanks have been operationally closed, meaning the waste has been removed and treated and the tanks have been "grouted."

The grout is a concrete-like material that locks up any left-behind remnants of the waste from the treatment process and fill them to the top. If the tanks were to be left empty, time would start to wear them down, so the grout keeps them solid.

In the 43 tanks remaining, SRR manages 36 million gallons of waste.

According to Foster, an operational plan designates each tank for different usage, like receipt of material or processing for the Defense Waste Processing Facility, or DWPF. That facility takes highly radioactive material from the tanks and vitrifies it, or turns it into glass.

According to company pamphlets, glass is stored in specially designed canisters and is kept in underground, seismically sound chambers until a permanent national nuclear repository is built.

Foster said the main focus of the company is reducing risk to the environment, as well as the surrounding communities.

“The infrastructure built in the Cold War is aging and so time is not our friend. We are better off doing this work sooner rather than later, and we are trying optimize business to get this done in the best time frame possible,” he said.

The SRR system plan aims to close the final tank in 2041, 25 years from now. The DWPF facility opened in 1996, putting the company at about the halfway mark. SRR is currently operating under a contract that ends June 30, 2017. Bidding has begun for the next contract to be awarded and while the company may change, the mission remains the same.

“The plan is shooting for 2041 to be out of business and done,” Foster said.

He said that, by the 2041 goal, most of the waste will be vitrified and the plan is to work themselves out of business.

Nuclear Regulatory Committee cites violations at MOX project

[The Aiken Standard](#)

July 31, 2016

In a letter and report this week, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission outlined two violations at the already contentious Mixed Oxide Fuel Fabrication Facility, or MOX. The following day, another letter was sent to announce the findings of another investigation into allegations of misconduct at the facility.

The investigation came after an October inspection in 2015 found potential safety and construction guideline violations. The inspection report noted issues with ledgers designed to support floor panels in one of the operations areas. According to previous reporting from the Aiken Standard, the NRC noted in the 2015 report that measures to assure that requirements were correctly translated by CB&I MOX Services, the MOX contractor, into design documents were inadequate. Meaning, the ledgers installed weren't properly checked to be in accordance with the design documents.

The new report stated the ledgers were undersize, less than specified length, undercut and had code prohibited joint design. But, it also said no actual personnel safety or nuclear safety consequences resulted from the deficient ledger assembly welds.

The MOX plutonium disposition project has been a hot-button item for politicians and nuclear watchdogs and is the crux of a lawsuit filed by South Carolina against the U.S. Department of Energy. In attempts to shutter the project, the Obama Administration has called the project past deadline and over budget.

The project is part of a nuclear non-proliferation agreement with Russia, meant to mix weapons-grade plutonium with other fissile material, such as natural uranium, to produce fuel for commercial, nuclear reactors. The lawsuit between the state and the federal government was heard in late June, and a ruling in the case is pending.

The MOX subcontract company responsible for the faulty welding noted by the NRC is Specialty Maintenance Construction Incorporated, or SCMI, and the most recent letter from the NRC cites possible reasons for its inadequacies. "The findings point to inadequate training, a vendor going through a learning curve for nuclear work and vague work instruction packages."

The letter also outlined a second violation by CB&I MOX Services. It stated that MOX Services did not adequately conduct audits, specifically indicating a lack of audits of the welding contract company. It said audit records did not document objective evidence of inspections or surveillances related to manual welding during their audits.

In the NRC letter, the commission also outlined results from investigations into a third potential issue. It wrote that it looked into allegations that quality-related documents associated with safety-related welds were falsified by SCMI. The letter noted there was no evidence to support that any kind of deliberate or willful misconduct occurred and no signs or indications that SMCI falsified any records or documents. However, it did note that the welding subcontractor had a high rate of failure.

All of the findings in the report and this week's letter were generated by the MOX inspection by the NRC in 2015. Since then, the commission has conducted further inspections. The last inspection report was issued April 29, 2016, and contained no cite worthy violations. MOX was recognized as meeting criteria for NRC's highest safety rating, a rating it has garnered for six consecutive years.

However, the report did highlight violations in the ductwork installation. But, according to the report, those weren't significant safety concerns and did not meet criteria for issuance of citations. CB&I MOX Services is currently processing proposals for the next ductwork contractor that would take over those responsibilities later this year.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission will decide on some kind of actions to enforce the contractors remuneration. According to this week's report, before the NRC makes its enforcement decision MOX Services has 30 days to pen a response to the findings or request a pre-decision enforcement conference. If the conference is selected by MOX Services, an announcement will be made and the public will be able to attend.
